

**EPPING TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD
AT EPPING HALL, ST JOHNS ROAD, EPPING CM16 5JU
ON THURSDAY, 9 MAY 2024 AT 7.00PM**

- PRESENT:** Town Councillors: C Burgess (Town Mayor), C McCredie (Deputy Mayor)
N Avey, L Burrows, J Duffell, H Pegrum, G Scruton, R Sharif, H Whitbread,
Janet Whitehouse, Jon Whitehouse, M Wright
- OFFICERS:** Miss B Rumsey (Town Clerk, Epping Town Council)
Mrs G Vallis (Planning & Events Officer, Epping Town Council)

One member of the press and 31 members of the public were present.

522 OPENING OF THE MEETING

The Town Clerk, Miss B Rumsey welcomed residents to the meeting and announced housekeeping information. The Town Clerk handed over to the Town Mayor, Cllr C Burgess who introduced each of the 12 Town Councillors individually and explained the format for the meeting.

523 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

524 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 20th APRIL 2023

NOTED that the minutes of the above meeting were submitted to an Ordinary meeting of the Town Council held on Tuesday, 13th June 2023 and appropriate action had been taken where necessary. The meeting approved the minutes, and the Mayor signed the minutes as a correct record.

525 ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Annual Report for 2023/24 was received. The Town Mayor advised the meeting that any questions would be taken under agenda item 9 Open Forum.

526 REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR (Cllr C Burgess)

Cllr C Burgess, Town Mayor gave a brief report on the Town Council's main areas of work in the past year.

Epping Town Council are a busy Town Council who look after many different aspects of Epping life, including six recreation grounds, five playgrounds, two allotment sites, two public halls, Bury Lane cemetery, Epping's Historic Monday Charter Market, the Town Show, Christmas Market, Talk About Epping magazine, Epping War Memorial and Epping's Christmas lights. In 2014, Epping Town Council took over the running of Bakers Lane public toilets. Unfortunately, in 2023, the toilets needed to be closed due to severe vandalism. We are working with partners on trying to rectify this situation.

Stonards Hill recreation ground skate park

We were delighted to learn that we have been awarded £115,000 from the National Lottery towards refurbishing our skate park at Stonards Hill recreation ground. We are currently working through the legalities surrounding such a large award and hope to be able to deliver

the new skate park, the design of which has been informed by some of the skaters themselves, later this year.

Outdoor chess table

Thanks to the Rotary Club of Epping, we have just installed a new outdoor chess table at Stonards Hill recreation ground, by Julies café, to provide even more leisure facilities at this popular green space.

Monday Market and new market website

Epping Town Council are very proud of their historic Royal Charter market. Traditional markets, like ours, are hard to sustain, especially on a Monday, but conversely, we know that having our market on a Monday, increases footfall in the High Street on a Monday and supports the High Street as a whole. There are also not as many markets on a Monday as other days, which helps us to keep our traders. We have developed a new website for our market to showcase our loyal traders.

Planning

Epping Town Council continue to act as a Consultee on planning and Tree Protection Order (TPO) tree applications that affect Epping Parish and the Committee meets twice a month to consider all applications. In this Civic Year, we have considered 133 applications so far.

Neighbourhood Planning

Epping Town Council have been working on the Neighbourhood Plan for Epping for 10 years and signed off the Plan last year. It is now with Epping Forest District Council who are making their checks before it will be put forward for examination and referendum.

Epping Town Sign

The Town Council have just installed a new Town Sign on the Town Green. The previous sign was damaged in the bad weather over winter. The sign has been handmade by our local sign maker and this one features things relating to Epping, such as the Market Charter and Forest stag.

Epping War Memorial

Epping's precious war memorial is now 103. It is a Grade II listed monument and its care is very specific. Last year, we employed a specialist conservator to clean the memorial. This has to be done in a particular way as to not damage the fragile stone.

Town Awards

The Town Council recognises many individuals and businesses throughout the year with Town Awards and this year we have commended a Townsperson of the Year, an outstanding Community Group and a Freeman of Epping.

Town Show and Christmas Market

Our annual Town Show at Stonards Hill recreation ground and Christmas Market in the High Street were both a great success. We also light up Epping at Christmas with Christmas trees and lights each year and are currently working on some alternatives for 2024.

Financial support

Epping Town Council provide a financial contribution to support Epping in Bloom with their planting work and also pay for other key things in the town, such as the Pipe Band for Remembrance Sunday.

Employer

Epping Town Council is an employer of fifteen members of staff, who are managed by the Town Clerk or Proper Officer. Council takes its responsibilities as a good employer very seriously and trains and supports its workforce to be able to deliver the many things we do for the town. The fifteen members of staff are split between the office team, the grounds team

and the caretaking team and while three teams, they all work together for the good of Epping.

Finances

The Town Council monitor their spending very carefully and provide many vital services and functions for the Town. More detailed information on the Town Council finances is featured in the Annual Report and if you have any financial questions, our Key Member for Finance, Cllr Grahame Scruton and our Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Beverley Rumsey, will do their best to answer them.

D Day 80th commemorations

Epping Town Council will be leading a beacon lighting event on Thursday 6th June 2024 from 7pm at Epping Fire Station, in partnership with the Hemnall Social Club. More information can be found on the posters around.

I would like to thank Cllr John Duffell in his capacity as secretary of the Royal British Legion, for all the fascinating information on D-Day, which you will find on display.

In conclusion...

I am very proud to have been elected Town Mayor for the 2023/24 Civic Year and this is my last formal Council meeting before the new Mayor is elected next week. As Town Mayor and Chairman, I Chair Council meetings and I know how hard everyone here works for the benefit of the Town. Thank you to my fellow Town councillors and our excellent team of staff for their ongoing hard work, loyalty and commitment.

527 REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING & NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING (Cllr N Avey)

Good evening and thank you. I hope you have had a chance to read my reports as Chairman of the Planning & General Purposes and Neighbourhood Planning Committees.

On Planning, we have had another busy year. There have been a large number of planning Applications processed by the Committee and our comments returned to Epping Forest District Council. This looks set to continue. For example, at the meeting scheduled for next Tuesday, we will look at 14 separate applications to consider. In the main, these applications are reasonably straightforward; a simple extension to a dwelling house or an application for some remedial action on a tree. However, we do receive some potentially contentious applications. If I again take next week's meeting as an example, we have an application to build a three storey block of flats behind the old Barclays Bank building. This application will take careful consideration from the Committee. As to negative trends, we have seen an uptake in applications to knock down existing dwellings for redevelopment or applications for buildings on rear or side gardens. Some of these applications may be entirely acceptable, however we will object where the development in the Committee's view constitutes overdevelopment or damages the existing street scene.

In the recent elections, (I think I can mention this now), I think every candidate of whatever political view supported the protection of the Green Belt. However, it is notable that swathes of land around the town are now owned by developers.

Clearly the Committee wish to support residents in keeping the existing Green Belt intact around the town.

If I may move onto the Neighbourhood Plan. This has I'm afraid taken a very long time to bring to fruition. We have submitted what we hope is the final draft of the Neighbourhood Plan to the Epping Forest District Council. We are awaiting final comments before hopefully moving to the appointment of an external Inspector and then to Referendum before hopefully through to adoption. I received some unexpected and welcome news this afternoon. Epping Forest District Council has now confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan can move to the next stage. Thank you.

528 PRESENTATION OF TOWN AWARDS

(i) Civic Awards 2023

There were two Civic Awards for 2023.

Willow Barn: The Town Mayor presented Maria Sanchez and Paul Samouelle with their certificate for Willow Barn. The Town Mayor stated that the award was made in recognition of the restoration work on Willow Barn which respected the character of the building and architectural details.

RSJ Brickwork & Construction: The Town Mayor presented RSJ Brickwork and Construction with their award was made in recognition for the quality of the craftsmanship with the conservation bricks in the wall they built near Egg Hall.

(ii) Best kept allotment 2024: Meadow Road – Catherine Gurney who was presented with her certificate and £25 cheque by the Town Mayor. The Town Mayor stated that this award was made in recognition for the very high standard of cultivation of an allotment.

(iii) Best kept allotment 2024: Lower Bury Lane – Kathy Metodiev who was presented with her certificate and £25 cheque by the Town Mayor. The Town Mayor stated that this award was made in recognition for the very high standard of cultivation of an allotment.

529 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION TIME

Epping Town Councillors led round the table discussions on Epping High Street and Monday Market, Epping Town Council events (Town Show and Christmas Market) or recreation grounds and playgrounds, in three separate groups.

After the discussions, the following feedback was given to the meeting:

Epping Town Council events (Town Show and Christmas Market)

Cllr R Sharif said that at their table the feedback was that the Town Show was a huge success; that the Christmas Market was a huge success and there was nothing to add on them.

Cllr Janet Whitehouse said that at their table they had an interesting discussion.

Christmas Market

Extend the lights at the other end of the town near the war memorial. Cllr Whitehouse said that she thought it was the tree sleeves that were wanted as the resident had been saying how attractive they are. Cllr Whitehouse said that the trees on the shops were liked and they would like these to be kept and apparently solar powered lights are available, and it was suggested that it might be possible to get solar powered lights for the Christmas trees. Cllr Whitehouse said that at their table they discussed the spread or bunching of the food stalls, and all wanted them spread. One resident said the food stall near the stage needs to be moved away as it contributes to the crowd and congestion there. It was suggested about making the stage area bigger. Another suggestion was to have more seating. Cllr Whitehouse said she was not sure if this was relating to the stage so people could sit and listen. Cllr Christine Burgess said we can't tell the shop keepers to put their tables and chairs out for people to use but we might be able to suggest it.

Town Show

Cllr Whitehouse said that they had only a short time to discuss this and most was focused on advertising. One of the residents knew nothing about the Town Show and said he'd not seen any adverts. The suggestions were to have a large A board on the piazza; have banners on the railings at the top of St Johns Road and by the crossing by Nationwide and advertise at the station. A different topic, the fun fair at the show. Cllr Whitehouse said that a resident asked for a different provider. Initially it seemed to be to have different rides, etc but then it emerged that the main concern was safety.

Epping High Street and Monday Market

Cllr M Wright said that the discussion at her table were about vehicle parking in Epping.

Cllr Wright said that unfortunately people park in the wrong places and churn the grass verges.

Cllr Wright said that it seems that Highways are not helpful. Cllr Wright said that the feedback

about the Monday Market was that it runs extremely successful if the weather is reasonable. Cllr Wright said that the High Street works well, and it would be good to try to do something for parking.

Recreation grounds and playgrounds

Cllr John Duffell said that the feedback in particular was about children's equipment and in particular suitable ones for special needs. Cllr Duffell said that the Lower Swaines playground has been brought up to standard and it would be good to have more outdoor equipment at other playgrounds.

530 OPEN FORUM

The Town Mayor invited residents to raise questions or comments relating to matters specific to the town of Epping. Answers to questions were given by members or staff of the Town Council and any representatives of the District and County Councils. The Town Mayor said that if we were unable to respond to any questions at the meeting, they will be followed up with the resident in person after the meeting.

Question 1: Cllr C McCredie said that she had a question from a resident. She said that the question was about the closure signage on the High Street from 7th to 11th May from Friday to Tuesday. Cllr McCredie asked if this work would affect the Monday Market. Cllr H Whitbread said that she would look into this with Highways Essex after the meeting and will feedback to the Town Council.

Question 2: Andy from CM16 had a question about the new multi-storey parking. He asked why businesses were let fail such as the Ceroc dance class who is losing revenue at Epping Hall because of the cost of the new parking in the evenings. Andy said that he had contacted Cllr H Whitbread a few times but had not received a reply. Cllr Whitbread apologised that she had not got back to the resident. Cllr Whitbread said that she is only one of 54 councillors at the District Council and it was Qualis Commercial who set the car parking charges. Cllr Whitbread said that she would ask the Qualis Commercial board to review the charges.

Question 3: Caroline from CM16 said that we own Qualis as it belongs to the taxpayers. She said that she wanted factual information on the car park income Qualis that is generated after 6pm to midnight. She said it is difficult to find this information. Cllr H Whitbread said that she would go back and ask these questions and confirmed that Qualis Commercial is owned by Epping Forest District Council. Cllr Whitbread said that the income generated goes back to Epping Forest District Council but understands the residents concerns. Cllr Whitbread said that the district has the lowest income tax in Essex. Cllr C Burgess questioned how much profit this company is making and that we must support businesses especially with the cost of living crisis.

Question 4: Graham Foy CM16 said that he lives opposite Stonards Hill recreation ground. He said that he understands why the Town Council will be charging to park there at the car parks after three hours. He said that over the last year, he has seen more and more people park there and not go in the park but to the District Council's Civic Offices because the car parking there is being mainly turned into flats. He said that he fears that the next car parks used will be at the NHS hospitals which are currently free to go to use the Civic Centre. Beverley Rumsey said that the car parks were open from 9am to dusk and cars would for example come in at 10am and stay all day. She said that there will be signs on the gates in mid-May with number plate recognition at Stonards Hill car park and the fees will be shown which will be between £1 and £2 per hour with all day for £10. Beverley said that the main Stonards Hill car park would be open 24 hours as a trial and the Jack Silley Pavilion car park will be closed after dusk. Beverley said that it will be implemented on 29th May and will be monitored to see how it goes. Beverley said that there has been anti-social issues with cars parked there and

the revenue will be used to finance for example resurfacing at Stonards Hill recreation ground. Beverley said that there has been no costs in implementing the car parking arrangements.

Question 5: Barbara Scruton commented on the cost of the car parking which could be a conflict of interest. She said that the café would be losing income because of the other car parking charges. She suggested reducing the cost of the car parking. Cllr H Whitbread said that she would had talked to other councillors as well as Qualis Commercial about this but she is only one of a number of councillors.

Question 6: Ralph Cullen commented on the constant flow of traffic that goes down Lower Bury Lane including lorries and tractors. He said that he needs help from other people when he is out cutting the grass verges. He suggested about imposing speed restrictions as he had two mirrors installed for safety. Cllr H Whitbread said that speed surveys have been done on that road and an average taken. Cllr Whitbread suggested meeting the resident and a representative from Highways to look at the issue to bring to the Highways Panel. Ralph Cullen said that the tractors and large vehicles come down the road and turn the signs around which says the size and tonnage that can use the road. Cllr H Pegrum said that the speed signs are turned around because of the size of the tractors. Cllr Pegrum said that the large vehicles come down from the M11 and M25 and go down Bury Lane or Lindsey Street. Cllr Pegrum said that if anything is done about this, that the problem will just be moved somewhere else.

Question 7: Andy from CM16 had a question about bins. Andy said that lorry drivers don't put the bins back on the drives of the houses after they have been emptied which makes the properties vulnerable to burglars. Cllr H Whitbread said that she takes the feedback on board and will feedback to the relevant department at Epping Forest District Council.

Question 8: Caroline from CM16 had a question about the former Police Station parking bays. and where the funding for them came from. Cllr H Whitbread said that Essex Police had given them up and they were funded by a grant from My Locality grant funding which will be implemented.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending the Annual Town Meeting. The Town Mayor invited people to stay and speak to local Councillors after the meeting.

531 MEETING CLOSURE

The Town Mayor, Cllr C Burgess closed the meeting at 8.15pm.